



Kasey Martini gives a kitten a better view of things during a Rescue U project in Braxton County, W.Va.

The Kids Are All Right

Rescue U connects college students to shelters in need

JAMES HETTINGER

It's an age-old story: Older folks are always pre-dissing younger folks.

Cavemen probably lamented that the neighborhood youngsters lacked the gump-tion to hunt and gather like their elders.

Socrates, in a remarkably modern-sounding rant, railed against children's bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect for their parents, and love of chatter. (And, last time we checked, there were no cell phones in 400 B.C.)

Responsible adults have been horrified by the rabid young fans of everyone from Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley to Britney Spears and

Lady Gaga—and more than once they've predicted an imminent cultural collapse.

What's a kid gotta do to earn some respect?

Two words (well, almost): Rescue U. The program's youthful participants have found a way to prove their mettle and defy the skeptics—one animal shelter at a time.

Founded in 2006 as an outreach program of Animal Lifeline (a Pennsylvania-based non-profit that funnels food and supplies to needy shelters and rescues), Rescue U sends college students from around the country to do repairs and construction work at shelters that

have requested help. The work ranges from patching chain-link fences to substantially rebuilding shelters. The students volunteer their time, don't get any college credit, and usually give up vacation days to participate in Rescue U projects, which take seven to 10 days.

"It's so funny. People always like to say, 'The kids of this generation, they scare the heck out of me. They seem so lazy,'" says Bryna Donnelly, a Rescue U program manager. "... But you show them the way, and they do amazing things. We've got little 90-pound girls that we teach to weld that just eat it up."

A Little Elbow Grease

"I think the younger generation kind of gets beat on a lot by the older generation," adds Courtney Dickinson, a senior biology major and president of the Delaware Valley College chapter of Rescue U in Doylestown, Pa. "But there are a lot of college kids out there who really do want to make a difference, really do want to help."

Rescue U started small and has grown quickly. Donnelly, a college science professor, was doing construction work at a shelter in West Virginia through Animal Lifeline, which was founded by her friend Denise Bash. Some of Donnelly's students heard what she was up to and wanted to get involved. Donnelly says she and Bash "dragged the college students into it, and Rescue U was born."

For their first big trip, a vanload of about a dozen Rescue U volunteers traveled to South Carolina with \$3,000. They camped out in the middle of March in the pouring rain, ate peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches, did all their work with adjustable wrenches—and were able to put every penny into the shelter, Donnelly recalls.

As Rescue U did more trips, the tech-savvy young people posted videos online about their work and got busy in social media, greatly raising the group's visibility, Donnelly says. Local people heard about Rescue U and donated tools or supermarket



Rescue U program manager Bryna Donnelly cradles a beagle during a trip to Richie County, W.Va. The program gives students a chance to do "amazing things," Donnelly says.

gift cards, allowing the volunteers' diet to expand beyond peanut butter and jelly.

The group attracted more monetary donations and corporate sponsors, including the Petfinder.com Foundation (which bought Rescue U in August and hired Donnelly to continue running it). The Animal Rescue Site (a Petfinder.com partner that collects donations from the public and distributes them to charities) donated \$75,000 for a January 2012 trip to Oklahoma to rebuild a shelter destroyed by a tornado. Last May, the Petfinder.com Foundation won a \$400,000 Chase Community Giving award following a vote on Facebook; Donnelly says that grant's purpose was to take Rescue U to the national level, and it enabled her to stop teaching full time.

By late 2011, Rescue U had completed about 23 shelter projects involving more than 125 volunteers. College students make up the bulk of the work force, but Donnelly says the program has also attracted parents, Eagle scouts, and returning college graduates and their siblings. Rescue U tries to recruit students from local colleges near the shelters receiving the work. "And usually once they do it once, they're hooked," she says. "They just love it."

Hooked on Helping

Dickinson, who has gone on a half dozen Rescue U trips, counts herself among those who have gotten hooked—despite the fact that she had previously never even set foot in an animal shelter.

On a trip to West Virginia, she found the number of dogs coming into one shelter "absolutely shocking." In South Carolina, Dickinson recalls that a local man making a food donation to the shelter approached the group of volunteers who were building animal beds, and told them he could hardly express how much their work meant to the shelter and the community.

The fellowship among the students is another attraction. "The people that I've met on these trips, they've become my best friends," Dickinson adds. "... It's like a second family."

In the four years she's been involved, Dickinson has seen the scope of Rescue U projects expand. On her first trip the students repaired a couple of fences; more recently they built an entire cat shelter. And when



Rescue U volunteer Matt Murrin helps put it all together during a project in Morehead, Ky. Since its founding in 2006, Rescue U has completed about two dozen construction and repair jobs.

they do repair fences, she adds, they now get much higher-quality chain link.

Last August, students descended on the Cameron County SPCA, a nonprofit with nine dog kennels in rural Emporium, Pa., and vice president Lisa Collins could hardly have been more impressed. The volunteers laid cement, did drywall work, put up fences for play pens, installed light fixtures, and painted—working from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. some days, Collins says.

"They never once interrupted anything at our kennel," she says. "They were very organized. They come in there, and they knew what they wanted to do, and they got it done. We kept asking them, 'What can we do? What can we do?' And they're like, 'Nothing. Just stand back and watch.' They were wonderful."

Despite its growth, Rescue U is determined to keep its grass-roots approach to deliver the maximum benefit to shelters, Donnelly says. Student volunteers were planning to drive rather than fly from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma in January, for example, and they camp out when the weather permits.

Rescue U's goals include getting another 20 colleges involved by the end of 2012, and to be in all the continental states by the end of 2015. Donnelly says, "We'd like to be Habitat for Humanity for animals." **AS**

For more information on Rescue U, go to RescueU.org. To view a video about Rescue U, go to bit.ly/zp0Ok1.

Out of the Trash Can, Into the Clinic

One dumpster-diving cat inspired Kandi Habeb to help thousands

BY NANCY PETERSON

The human population of Parkersburg, W.Va., has declined by nearly 5 percent in the last decade, partially because of plant shut-downs and other economic pressures. The community cat population has gone down at the same time, mostly because of Kandi Habeb.

Habeb, a retired office manager, and her husband were leaving a restaurant in the winter of 2004 when she spotted a cat jumping out of the dumpster carrying a chicken bone. "So, as my husband puts it, I ran home, got several cans of cat food, and back I went," says Habeb. The next day she returned to feed the cat and found there were four kittens, too.

"I knew there were feral cats," Habeb says, "but I didn't think we had that many around here. I was just appalled."

Six months after her dumpster encounter, Habeb founded West Virginia's first full-service trap-neuter-return service, the Save a Kitty Feral Cat Program. Since then, the group has helped 2,253 cats, providing services from trap loans and caretaker education to spay/neuter.

Habeb's biggest obstacle at the time was finding veterinary help—none of the local vets seemed to want to work with ferals. She ended up making several trips to the Help for Animals clinic in Barboursville, W.Va.—nearly two hours each way—taking 12 to 15 cats and kittens for sterilization each time. Beginning in August 2008, Save a Kitty was able to afford to bring the clinic's mobile unit to Belpre, Ohio—over the state line but only a few miles from Parkersburg—and had organized several surgeries there before expensive repairs forced the unit to shut down.

Habeb was devastated, but started looking for a new solution. Although the Rascal Unit out of Columbus, Ohio, was available, it required a minimum of 45 cats to make

the trip to Belpre economically worthwhile. Habeb's group couldn't initially afford it, but through donations, grants, and larger fundraisers, was finally able to begin bringing cats to the Rascal Unit in the fall of 2009.

The location makes for a nice change from the long drive Habeb once had to make. "It works great. You cross the bridge in downtown Parkersburg and you're in Belpre in 1.9 miles."

Feral cat caretakers who request assistance go on a surgery waiting list until Save a Kitty targets their area for spay/neuter. The group then contacts caretakers to complete paperwork, pick up traps, and learn how to use them. On their scheduled day, bright and early, they bring their collected kitties to Belpre.

Save a Kitty currently uses the Rascal Unit two to four times yearly, while a local veterinarian, Leslie Elliott, offers 12 spots weekly at her private practice. "She's very knowledgeable and brought other vets into her practice recently," says Habeb. "She's trained them on spaying and neutering younger cats and kittens. So we actually have three vets helping us through that same practice now."

When Habeb started Save a Kitty, she had a very small foster network. "We were spending most of our time trying to tame and adopt out kittens in an area that was not adopting," she says. "So we stepped back

and decided to spay and neuter like crazy and maybe start our foster program up years down the road when there's more need for cats and kittens."

Save a Kitty and the Humane Society of Parkersburg joined forces. "A lot of my grant re-



Claudia is one of more than 2,250 cats Kandi Habeb's feral cat group has helped so far, offering services from trap loans and caretaker education to spay/neuter.

porting has to come from their numbers, and we work closely figuring out intake and euthanasia," says Habeb. "They give us areas to target where they're getting a lot of surrenders. ... If people call the shelter complaining about cats, the shelter refers the caller to Save a Kitty—every time."

The shelter has seen good results. "Our cat and kitten intake decreased by 14 percent from 2007 through 2010," says Maryann Hollis, the shelter's executive director, noting that the decrease during the busy months of July and August is actually closer to 28 percent.

Summer Wyatt, West Virginia state director for The HSUS, has long been impressed by Habeb's dedication. "Many people don't pay attention to feral cats; they consider them pests," says Wyatt. "Kandi treats these animals as amazing beings who have so much to offer and live for. The cats have reaped the benefits of her efforts in so many ways."

Habeb's reducing cat numbers, but increased human numbers are on her side. "The program I started sure wouldn't be successful if I didn't thank my volunteers and board members," says Habeb. "I started it, but I acquired a lot of wonderful people, and they're as committed as I am. That's definitely what's made it work." **AS**



Kandi Habeb, founder of Save a Kitty Feral Cat Program, takes a moment to scratch the cheeks of Woody, one of the friendlier colony kitties.

Nancy Peterson is cat programs manager at The HSUS.



You're helping us. We're helping you. We're all helping animals. Carry on!

Kudos & Thank You

Virginia is for (Animal) Lovers

Last summer, dogs trapped in misery at the site of a rural North Carolina puppy mill were spared and given care and a temporary home at the Norfolk SPCA, one of the dedicated Emergency Placement Partners of The HSUS. Eighty dogs—along with five cats and four rabbits—were rescued after law enforcement officials called The HSUS and asked for help. The HSUS in turn asked the Norfolk SPCA to assist on scene, and its staff chipped in to help take in the animals and gather evidence. After the raid, the SPCA transported the animals to its shelter in Virginia, where they were cared for prior to adoption. The Norfolk SPCA has been an incredible help to The HSUS and to the animals: In addition to assisting with this response, the shelter has also accepted animals from three other rescue responses: a puppy mill raid in Caldwell County, N.C.; a transport after floods overwhelmed a shelter in Natchez, Miss.; and puppy mill survivors from breeder closings in Missouri. Over the course of 2011, the shelter rehabilitated and placed almost 200 rescued animals.

Animal lovers in Virginia aren't all coastal—the Norfolk SPCA is just one of the amazing Emergency Placement Partners in the state. In the last year, the Richmond SPCA, the Lost Dog & Cat Foundation in Arlington, the Virginia Beach SPCA, and Loudoun County Animal Control combined have helped find new families for an additional 100 dogs rescued from cruelty situations and natural disasters.

Heads Up!

A long-term cooperative project between The HSUS and the Organizational Science graduate program at UNC Charlotte has resulted in positive outcomes for the sheltering community. The **Shelter Diagnostic System (SDS)** program, developed with input from HSUS sheltering experts and overseen by Dr. Steven Rogelberg, helps animal welfare groups analyze their internal strengths and weak-

nesses, and address areas that might need improvement—since a healthy shelter is a shelter that can save more lives. Rogelberg and his team have completed SDS evaluations for 62 shelters since 2005. The prevalence of volunteer programs in shelters, and the challenges that were made clear through the SDS, led Rogelberg and his team to develop a Volunteer Program Assessment (VPA) as well. Since 2010, VPAs for 58 shelters have been completed, all paid for with scholarship money from The HSUS. For more about the SDS program, see our feature on p. 26.

If you haven't checked out **Animal Sheltering's marketplace** yet, go online and find great deals for your organization. New special offers and discounts are currently available from John Paul Pet, Petsontees.com, and DonorPerfect Fundraising Software. Visit animalsheltering.org/marketplace.

Looking for **trainings or events** in your area? We have a calendar for you—and it's one you can use to promote your own workshops and conferences as well. Find or register a class in clicker training, a puppy mill protest, or an adopt-a-thon nearby—go to animalsheltering.org/training-events.

And when it comes to great training opportunities, don't forget that the mother of all conferences is just around the corner. **Animal Care Expo** is in Las Vegas this year, and it will be a total blast—the gambling, the lights, the strip. By which we mean, of course, the learning and networking opportunities. Workshops this year include sessions on saving more treatable animals; planning a large-scale seizure; teaching coexistence with community cats; social media strategies; farm animal cruelty cases; reaching underserved communities; disaster planning; media strategy, and so ... much ... more (sorry, we're out of breath).

Get the full list at animalsheltering.org/expo. And remember, early registration for Expo ends on March 31—register now and save \$50.

If you're coming to Expo, we could use your help with some brainstorming. If you use live-animal traps or capture, handling, or transport equipment, and have ideas on how these tools could be more user-friendly or humane, please come share your thoughts at our **Humane Design brainstorming meeting** at this year's Expo! You can also email them to us at humanedesign@humanesociety.org. Our Humane Design panel will present your ideas to equipment manufacturers and work with them to evaluate current and future products. Check the Expo schedule for meeting time and place.

Don't forget to check out the great new ads from **the Shelter Pet Project**! Go to theshelterpetproject.org to learn more about this campaign and get the materials for use in your community. **AS**

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Law, Order, and Animal Welfare

Officer in Washington state says her job combines her passions

Nicole Montano's job has taken her from a spider-infested culvert underneath a highway to a courtroom where she nervously awaited the outcome of a dogfighting trial. And in each place, she chalked up a victory.

Montano, 35, the lead animal protection officer for Spokane County Regional Animal Protection Service (SCRAPS) in Washington state, says one of the most memorable rescues in her eight years on the job occurred when she had to retrieve a dog who had wandered into the culvert under I-90, a busy freeway. The opening was barely big enough for Montano to fit, but she crawled about 30 feet in—contending with some “very scary” spiders—and managed to get a control pole around the dog and slowly pull him out.

She experienced a different kind of triumph in 2008, when she helped secure the first felony dogfighting conviction in Washington state. The case began in 2007 with a call about a dog running at large, dragging a heavy chain. The dog was gone by the time Montano arrived, but she discovered an illegal kennel with eight adult dogs, exceeding the county limit of four. She got a search warrant; she and other investigators found a treadmill, bite sticks, and other dogfighting paraphernalia, as well as a suspect who had a dogfighting tattoo covering his back.

After a two-week trial, Montano awaited the jury's verdict as her co-workers sat behind her, holding hands. “It was one of those kind of surreal moments,” she recalls. “... You kind of hold your breath and pray for the best, and then we got it.”

Montano, who has worked as a veterinary assistant and is completing a criminal justice degree, says her current job is nearly perfect, combining her passions for law enforcement and animal welfare.

In the edited interview that follows, she discusses her career with *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: What would you say is your favorite part of the job?

Nicole Montano: My favorite part would be the criminal investigations—taking the pieces of a puzzle and putting them together, and getting animals out of a bad situation while holding someone accountable for what happens.

In the years that you've been in the field, how would you say it's changed?

For our department, I would say our animal cruelty investigations have become more structured, more organized. We are not tolerant of animal cruelty. In addition to that, where we once were the dogcatcher, we are now animal protection officers, or humane law enforcement, so the perception is also changing. We are really evolving in this industry.

If you could wave a magic wand, what aspect of animal welfare work would you most like to change?

Well, other than spay/neuters, I would say tethering laws. I think communities need to start adopting anti-tethering laws, or have restrictions on the type of tethers that people use. We had two dogs die [last] summer that were both tethered in the middle of their yard—direct sun, no shade or shelter. One of the investigating officers took [one] DOA dog to the vet, and I was there for the necropsy part. It was probably about 20 minutes to a half hour from the time she removed the dog. And when [the veterinarian] cut into this dog, there was

steam pouring out of this dog. This dog literally cooked from the inside out.

Does anything stand out for you as your proudest accomplishment?

I would say any time I am rescuing an animal from an abusive situation, or taking that animal out of a negative environment, that's always a proud accomplishment for me. I think that's what keeps me going, especially in this field, where it can be almost soul-draining, in a sense—the accomplishments that keep your passion there, and keep you wanting to do what you're doing. **AS**



Nicole Montano says her position as lead animal protection officer in Spokane County is perfect for her because it allows her to pursue her passions for law enforcement and animal welfare. She helped secure the first felony dogfighting conviction in Washington state.

Scooping Up Savings



The cost of litter stinks. Have you considered wood stove pellets? Many organizations swear by them. Staff at Oakland Animal Services in California, Home at Last Humane Society in Oregon, and Oromocto & Area SPCA in British Columbia—among others—all dig pellets. More importantly, their cats dig them as well.

Generally, staff find that the pellets result in less *eau d'urine* in the cat rooms, less dust—which means less sneezing—and easier cleanup. The lower cost, usually about \$6 for a 50-pound bag, is nothing to pooh-pooh either. Cats rarely object to the pellets, but it's a good idea to keep some conventional litter on hand for the occasional picky customer. Ricardo Gaitan of the City of Sacramento Animal Care Services shelter in California thinks pellets are great, with the caveat that you shouldn't use pellets that contain any additives for binding or increased flammability; these can be bad for cats. (If you're unsure about additives, call the manufacturer.)

Here's how it works: When cats urinate on the extremely absorptive pellets, they disintegrate into sawdust, which may be removed using a slot-less scoop. To save unused pellets, a sifting two-piece litter box, such as Feline Pine's, is useful. Holes in the upper, elevated insert allow the sawdust to fall into the holding box below. Simply remove the feces from the top part, dump the sawdust from the bottom, and add more pellets as needed. Because you only have to remove and disinfect the box if it gets really dirty or stinky (which might be a red flag that the cat should see a veterinarian), this method saves time and fits with the principle of using spot cleaning rather than full daily disinfection.

Because most cats prefer fine-grained clumping litter, they're easily transitioned from pellets once they're in their new homes. If you're worried cats will turn up their noses at a change in litter material, you can send home a handful of pellets for adopters to sprinkle on top of their chosen type of litter. The HSUS tip sheet at humanesociety.org/litterboxproblems may be helpful, too.

—Nancy Peterson

Active Mind, Healthy Dog



Like all dogs, pit bull-type dogs need to be stimulated, exercised physically and mentally, and socialized. Isolated, many dogs can develop behavior problems such as chewing, spinning, and incessant barking and are missing exposure to the world outside the shelter.

Volunteers can provide exercise and socialization that overwhelmed shelter staff may not have time for. Well-designed and supervised play groups allow multiple dogs to wear themselves out and receive valuable social learning. (In the beginning, it is important to have a trainer/behaviorist involved in designing the play groups).

Mental stimulation is equally important. There are many free or low-cost items that can be used to keep a dog's mind active. Puzzle toys force dogs to problem-solve, which not only keeps their minds sharp, but teaches them how to work for what they value—food! For example, a dog learns, “When I push the Buster Cube, food pops out.”

Encourage people to donate old towels and clothes, and collect as many plastic containers as possible. Towels and clothes can be tightly braided, tied in knots, and put through the laundry to be used as tug toys. Plastic containers can be filled with treats such as cream cheese, peanut butter, and kibble—and smaller containers placed inside larger ones can provide an even greater challenge. Try filling a container with wet food and freezing it, so hours of boredom turn into hours of fun as the food melts and the dog gets it out of the container.

Dogs also need calm, quiet time with people. Encourage staff to do their paperwork or emails in the kennels; that way, the dogs get companionship and will become accustomed to normal daily tasks that they'll experience in a home. Allow dogs to be around when cleaning, stocking supplies, or during staff meetings—more activities that will help them acclimate to home life. **AS**

—Kenny Lamberti

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Tara Pahl, a customer care associate at the Capital Area Humane Society in Ohio, pulled Dasha the cat out of a minivan dashboard to greet a cheering crowd that included a local television camera.

A Dash of Trouble

Shelter worker pulls injured cat from minivan dashboard

BY JAMES HETTINGER

At least she didn't get all up in anyone's grill.

But a cat in central Ohio last October did venture deep into the innards of a minivan dashboard, and her rescue required both a mechanic's skill and a shelter worker's slender arms.

The incident began when minivan driver Nehal Dhruve struck the tortoiseshell cat on a road not far from the Capital Area Humane Society (CAHS) in Hilliard. Dhruve retrieved the cat, put her in the minivan, and headed for the shelter to seek help. One problem: The cat, who was initially unconscious or stunned, revived and "freaked out" along the way, according to CAHS development and communications manager Mary Hiser. The cat crawled under the gas and brake pedals while Dhruve was driving and found an opening that allowed her to wriggle up into the dashboard console.

"We could not see the cat at all," says Tara Pahl, a CAHS customer care associate who got to work around the same time the minivan driver arrived, about 11 a.m. "We

couldn't even hear [her]." Staff tried to lure the cat out with canned food, but she didn't budge.

Rachel Finney, CAHS's chief operating officer, recalls the shelter's customer care manager approaching her and saying, "Rachel, I got one for you." The manager explained the situation, adding that the driver suggested removing part of the dashboard—which prompted Finney to cry, "Waaaaiittt a minute!" Her staff knows animals, not automobiles, so they contacted Boyd's Goodyear, a local shop that services the shelter's fleet.

Mechanic Daryl McKay says he'd never gotten a call quite like this one. "Every now and then we get things up in dashes, but generally it's snakes or mice ... never cats."

He began removing parts of the dashboard, and Pahl was the natural choice to help because her hands and arms were small enough to reach into the gaps. "You could see [the cat] at different stages—

sometimes its eyes, sometimes its little head looking at you," Pahl says.

But most of the holes were too small to pull the cat through, she adds, and the rescue effort dragged on; McKay estimates he worked on the dashboard for two and a half to three hours. Meanwhile, the effort attracted a crowd that included Dhruve and members of her family, shelter staff, and TV news cameras.

"There were moments where it was fairly intense ... because we had such limited information about the health and status of the cat," Finney says, noting that Dhruve had simply said the cat was bleeding from her head. Whenever an animal is struck by a car, she explains, you worry about the possibility of shock or trauma. Staff didn't want to falsely assure Dhruve and her family that everything would be just fine.

But there were fun elements as well, after it became clear that there was a live cat to be rescued. Finney recalls, "There was a lot of chanting: 'Ta-ra! Ta-ra!'"

Eventually, McKay disassembled enough of the dashboard to allow Pahl to reach in and pull out the cat—prompting cheers and smiles from the crowd. "Tara does have thin arms, yes," Finney says with a laugh, as well as "a calm personality and a nice, soothing voice, so I think that kitty was a little bit more ready to come out and meet her."

Staff discovered the cat's injuries were limited to a tiny bit of blood on the bridge of her nose. Nicknamed "Dasha" by Hiser, the cat initially showed signs of upper respiratory infection, which prevented her from being moved to the adoption floor. Dasha wasn't microchipped, and no one came forward to claim her. Dhruve considered adopting Dasha but decided against it, according to Finney. Nearly a month after her adventure, the dashboard cat got adopted (along with 21 other kitties) on Nov. 11 during the shelter's \$11 adoption special.

Finney says the incident, reported on CNN's home page as well as the local news, brought attention to CAHS's mission and showed how far its staff will go to help animals and people in need. "It was an opportunity to highlight our caring people ... [who] do good things every day for animals." **AS**

The Great Skunk Debunk

The HSUS answers town's call for help

BY JIM BAKER

Police Lt. John Walcek had a problem on his hands, and it was a stinker.

Last summer, complaints that skunks were "overrunning" the town of Wareham, Mass., surged, with authorities receiving more than 50 calls, and it fell to Walcek to do something about it. Staff at The HSUS's Cape Wildlife Center in Barnstable hooked him up with HSUS wildlife experts Laura Simon and John Griffin, who headed to Wareham in July with an arsenal of ideas for nonlethal solutions.

Other methods hadn't worked: The year before, the town had spent thousands of dollars to have as many as 75 skunks trapped and killed. But complaints hadn't diminished.

Accompanied by Walcek, Griffin and Simon visited about a dozen properties where residents had complained. As their tour progressed, more and more neighbors would come outside to share their stories, too.

"We kind of felt like the Pied Piper," Simon says.

The pair shared simple solutions such as putting garbage in proper containers rather than plastic bags, screening the spaces under elevated homes and porches to block potential den sites, securing sheds so skunks can't dig underneath, and erecting low barriers around backyards. That evening, they gave a presentation showing that, rather than being quick to spray people and pets, skunks are actually quite difficult to provoke.

"One of the key things that I continually find ... is that people are afraid of skunks because they misunderstand them," says Simon. "A lot of the concerns are fear-based—what a skunk may do. People are worried about things that aren't going to happen."

As it turns out, Griffin says the skunkapalooza was likely overhyped: The spike in complaints and sightings coincided with the time of year when juvenile skunks leave their mothers in search of their own territory. And residents could also have been seeing the same skunks over and over, leading to the perception that the animals were taking over the town.

Since the visit, complaints have dropped to nearly zero. "They stemmed the tide of what ... these neighbors were calling a 'skunk invasion,'" Walcek says. "And folks that came in [to the presentation] that were originally ready to hang the skunks up by their tails ... left and said, 'You know what? I guess I understand a little better.'" **AS**



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The little guys have personalities, too! Make sure your photos of them show it.

Shooting the Small Fry

It's a shame when online adoption listings for cats and dogs show animals who don't look appealing. Black cats set against dark backgrounds, their sweet faces lost in a blur. Dogs whose unholy green or red glowing eyes suggest adoption listings reading: *Hellhound mix; prefers to be only pet. May eat smaller children.*

Overall, though, most shelters and rescues are getting smarter about their adoption photos, making sure that the pictures they post show animals people would want to take home, not animals who seem to require an exorcist.

One area of imagery where some groups still fall short, though, is in photos of small animals—the mice, the rats, the hamsters and gerbils and guinea pigs. Far too often, online pictures of these guys are missing, consist of a blurry shot of a cage with some hairy lumps in it, or perhaps just ambiguous bedding material.

These little dudes have enough problems without being made to look like Tribbles. These days, a decent digital camera can take a good close-up shot of Mickey, one that captures his personality in a way that'll help him find a home. Here are some basic tips:

Learn your camera settings. The "macro" setting on a digital camera is usually designed for close-ups, and some require the user to hold the button down to focus before

clicking. If you know your machine, it'll help you end up with a shot of a gerbil rather than a tannish blob.

Focus on their faces. It's more difficult for people to connect with an animal when they can't see her facial expression. The more big brown eyes, adorable pink noses, and fat, seed-filled cheeks you can show, the better.

Color their world. As with any pet, make sure there's enough contrast in the surroundings that your little guy shows up. If you have the space, set up photo shoots against cheerful colors of cloth.

Team up. If you don't have a safe space to allow the animals to sit and pose, have someone who's comfortable with small critters hold them for photos. If you do this, try to show the person (smiling, please!) and the pet, rather than just the pet sitting in an anonymous set of hands. Showing these little guys interacting with a person will emphasize their people-friendly qualities to potential adopters. If you have to shoot them in their cages ...

... Show some action. Catch your little dudes when they're up and about, running on their wheels, nom-nom-nom-ing on a snack, or exploring their cages. (It may mean staying late one day, as some rodents are nocturnal party animals.) **AS**

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MOUThPIECES



We've opened the Mouthpieces department to reader submissions! Many shelters and rescues have produced fantastic public service announcements. If you've created one you'd like to share, please submit it to us. We'll use some of the best ones in the magazine.

The small print: Submitted PSAs can retain your organizational branding, but you must be OK with allowing other groups to add their contact info so that they'll be able to use the ad in their own communities.

The technical stuff: Our preferred file format is PDF/X-1a:2001 with crop marks at least .125 inches from artwork. Accepted alternate file formats are QuarkXPress, InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop. If an ad is submitted in a format other than PDF, graphics and fonts must be included — images must be CMYK and 300 dpi. Line art must be at least 600 dpi. The dimensions must be (or must be adjustable to) full page including bleed: 8.375 inches by 10.75 inches; live area/non bleed: 7.125 inches by 9.5 inches.

To download this and prior Mouthpieces to use, go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces. To submit a PSA, please contact us at asm@humanesociety.org.

New Digs and Renovations

BY JIM BAKER



The Maryland SPCA's new adoption lobby.

Bye-Bye, Double-Wide

"It was 1970 in here before," says Cheryl Bernard Smith, director of operations at the Maryland SPCA in Baltimore, describing how her facility looked prior to a \$2.1 million renovation completed in March 2011. Visitors to the shelter entered via a double-wide trailer attached to the building, which served as both the admissions and adoption department. "Before, adoptions were happening right next to the counter where admissions were happening, so it was like, 'Oh, hey, I was adopting this dog, but are you bringing [in] that one, because I'd like to adopt that one.' It was just crazy." The renovation—done by a design/build team of Penza Bailey Architects of Baltimore and Constantine Commercial Construction in Timonium, Md.—changed how the shelter looks and how it's able to

operate. The trailer was replaced with separate adoption and admission areas enlivened by bright colors and plastic laminate; separate exam rooms for cats and dogs; and a space used for behavior assessment and classes, adding about 6,000 square feet to the shelter. Cat colony housing replaced cages, and the kennel area was upgraded with an epoxy floor, glass-front runs, and sound-absorbing panels to reduce noise. Jay Orr, an architect with ARQ Architects, offered pro bono advice on the selection of materials. "The staff was amazing—what they were able to do with that double-wide trailer," says Laura Penza, principal architect at Penza Bailey. "They did what they could, but now their facility matches their expertise, which allows them to do their job better."

One Step at a Time

The Marin Humane Society (MHS) in Novato, Calif., had initially planned to build a new shelter to replace its 1968 facility, but then the economy nosedived, and a major renovation and retrofitting project was launched instead. In stages over the last four years, the shelter has added renovated recovery runs for dogs in the clinic, with added visibility and ease of access; renovated cat adoption rooms, changing from individual, stainless-steel cages to large, cat colony and flexi-use rooms; a renovated small companion animal space, from a partitioned corral in the lobby to a quiet room with big viewing windows; a new intake center for receiving shelter pet transfers; separate dog and cat intake exam rooms, with adjacent new housing spaces, a grooming area, and a feral cat room; and a renovated dog adoption space, with glazed-tile rooms with lots of glass and natural light, Dutch doors, sound-absorbing panels, and a central island. All of this was followed by a renovation of the get-acquainted area for dog adoptions. Chief operating officer John Reese estimated the total cost to be about \$1.5 million. MHS hired a draftsman to draw up the plans for all the renovations, except for the intake center, which was designed by Kelly Associates, an architectural firm in Novato. Reese is most excited about that center—a third of MHS's animals come in through its shelter transfer program—and the renovated adoption spaces. These two aspects in particular "brought us to a far more comfortable, relaxing environment, not only for the animals, but also as an experience for the adopter," he says.



The renovated dog adoption area at the Marin Humane Society.

THIS PAGE, LEFT: MARYLAND SPCA; RIGHT: KRISTIN HERRERA/MARIN HUMANE SOCIETY. OPPOSITE PAGE: MINDY BACON/THE BACON GROUP INC.

From Cars to Cats (and Dogs)

A former auto dealership in Alpharetta, Ga., is now home to the new, second location of the Atlanta Humane Society, following a \$2.95 million renovation project. The 32,000-square-foot facility—at the heart of which are four glassed-in cat colony rooms and a “cat mall” area—is located in a suburb of Atlanta, about 35 miles from the main shelter facility. The location, which opened in December, can house 70-75 cats, 56 dogs, and 28 puppies. It features a surrender area, a spay/neuter clinic, an adoption counseling room, visitation rooms, and a second-story space for offices and a conference room. “We did a lot of research, and very few of our adopters were coming from this area,” says Richard Rice, executive vice president. “And there’s not another adoption center probably within 15 or 20 miles.” The new facility is located on seven acres, which provides plenty of outdoor space for special events. The humane society purchased the building and property in January 2011, renovation work began in the summer, and animals were moved into the site in time for a Dec. 2 opening. Rice touts the shelter’s modern, retail look, featuring lots of glass and an open feel that carried over from the building’s original use as an auto showroom. The Bacon Group Inc. in Clearwater, Fla., designed the new facility. “The challenge was making the architecture that was on the inside match the goals of the owner ... and making this really, truly a primarily adoption-focused facility,” says Rick Bacon, president and principal architect. **AS**

Is your organization retrofitting or building a new facility? Tell us about it at asm@humanesociety.org.



Two residents check out the cat colony room at the new Atlanta Humane Society facility in Alpharetta, Ga.

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Helping Animals Find a New Place in the Sun

Florida shelter puts out welcome sign for scores of rescued and displaced pets

BY JIM BAKER

There was just something about Mia.

Heidi Nielsen, assistant director of the Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League/Humane Society of the Palm Beaches, has worked at the West Palm Beach, Fla., shelter for 11 years. She's knows what it's like to want to take them all home. But when she and her husband saw a female mastiff-German shepherd mix who had arrived on a transport of dogs from flood-besieged Mississippi—Nielsen knew that this time, resistance was futile.

"After that long trip, and everything she'd been through, she was right in front of the cage with her little paw up in the air, trying to get my husband to say hello to her," Nielsen says. The dog looked like a giant boxer with a tail, was only 6½ months old, but already weighed 100 pounds. After a 14-day quarantine and spay surgery, the dog—now named Mia—went home with the couple, joining their existing menagerie of three dogs and two parrots.

This happy ending came out of the shelter's kind deeds: As a participant in The HSUS's Emergency Placement Partners (EPP) program, last June the shelter took in a transport of 19 surrendered dogs—including Mia—from the Natchez Adams

County Humane Society in Mississippi, in order to free up space for pets displaced by historic floods.

All the dogs from Natchez were eventually adopted, according to Nielsen. But, more strikingly, the same weekend they arrived at Peggy Adams ARL, the shelter adopted out 45 dogs—all from the local community—thanks to publicity garnered by news of the displaced pets.

The shelter is no stranger to needy animals from other locales: Last March, the shelter accepted 20 dogs from an HSUS hoarding raid in Alabama, and later in 2011 made room for about 30 cats seized in a raid on a sanctuary gone bad in Gainesville, Fla.

The EPP program relies on a network of animal welfare organizations who take in animals saved from natural disasters, hoarding situations, animal fighting operations, or puppy mills. The three EPP transfers that Peggy Adams ARL has taken part in have generated media attention, donations—and more adoptions of local animals, too. "Everyone wants to adopt a disaster animal, so we typically have a really good turnout," says director of operations Thomas Adair.

"They're very good at capturing public interest in our issues. ... They're just a phenomenal organization," says Michelle Cascio, manager of the EPP program.

The shelter has a long history in its community, stretching back to 1924, when a group of eight prominent women met on the porch of a local advocate to address a problem: Animals were being abandoned by Florida



"snowbirds," winter visitors returning north. Incorporated in 1925, it started out in an abandoned tuberculosis hospital on the grounds of an old Air Force base, with orange crates as makeshift cages, and chicken wire fashioned into animal pens.

Almost 90 years later, Peggy Adams ARL now boasts a 13½-acre property that's home to a 38,000-square-foot, \$11 million building, completed in early 2010. The new facility—the Grace Pavilion, named after its benefactor, Jane Grace—houses an adoption center, a retail boutique, and a 15,000-square-foot medical/surgical unit where two staff veterinarians treat shelter pets and provide low-cost vaccinations. A third veterinarian performs low-cost spay/neuter procedures.

The facility will enable the shelter to accomplish more than it ever could before. The medical/surgical clinic will eventually have operating-room cameras that stream live video to veterinary classes around the country. The building also has an apartment that can house veterinary interns; the shelter is developing an ambitious program of paid internships for recent veterinary school graduates and externships for veterinary students.

With the Grace Pavilion the shelter has leapt forward in the number of spay/neuter surgeries it's able to perform. The old



clinic was 1,500 square feet, which limited the shelter to about 5,000 surgeries a year, Nielsen says. The shelter had sterilized more than 7,000 animals as of the end of November 2011, and its goal for this year is 10,000.

The biggest challenge facing the shelter, according to Adair, is the high number of feral and community cats in Palm Beach County. The shelter has taken steps to address the issue by forming relationships with local feral cat groups. When Dianne Suave, director of Palm Beach County Animal Care and Control, organized a meeting with these groups, she invited staff from area shelters. "So that's when I got to know quite a few of the ladies, 30 or 40 of them, and I stayed in touch," Nielsen says. She let this network of advocates know that when the shelter's new facility was complete, Peggy Adams ARL would be launching a feral TNR program. In 2011, the shelter sterilized more than 1,600 feral cats.

PetSmart Charities has awarded the shelter a \$100,000, two-year grant, which it's using to launch a major spay/neuter initiative in two ZIP codes in Palm Beach County that have the highest numbers of ferals. The goal is to perform 1,000 spay/neuters per year on feral and owned cats in those areas. Pet owners and feral cat groups will only have a \$10 co-pay for each surgery. "The research has shown us that once you reach an 85 percent spay/neuter rate in a colony, that's when you stop having litters," Adair says.

The shelter's first priority is to provide services to the surrounding community, says Richard Anderson, CEO. But the shelter likes to partner with The HSUS and ASPCA to help animals in emergency situations. "We've had just an incredible amount of success placing them into new homes, rehabilitating those animals that needed a little more care and treatment," he says.

Adair agrees: "Our aim is to help *all* animals, not just the ones within arm's reach." **AS**



1 Kennel technician Heather Fair trades smiles with Mesha, a Siberian husky, while adoption counselor David Montgomery cares for Lola, a pit bull mix, in the Grace Pavilion's lobby.

2 Development manager Lauren Ellis hugs a dog arriving last summer at Peggy Adams ARL on a transport of dogs from the flooded Mississippi region. "We were so grateful to have each other," she says.



3 Animal care technician PerryAnn Vining of Peggy Adams ARL unloads one of 19 dogs on a transport last summer after flooding in Mississippi. The West Palm Beach, Fla., shelter participates in the Emergency Placement Partners program of The HSUS.

4 Amber Capotorto, a member of the development staff at Peggy Adams ARL, makes cutouts for room doors in the lobby of the shelter's Grace Pavilion prior to its opening in January 2010.



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Picture This

Pet portrait fundraiser nets thousands of dollars for California animal welfare organizations

BY JIM BAKER



Linnea Lenkus shoots pictures of people all day long, but her favorite subjects have four feet, a cold nose, and a wagging tail.

"For some reason, I have an affinity with dogs. We just seem to speak to each other," says Lenkus, owner of Linnea Lenkus Fine Art Portrait Studios. "They come over to me, and sit on my feet, and say, 'Hey, you're mine.'"

Lenkus is a busy portrait photographer with studios in Long Beach, Irvine, and

Pasadena, Calif. Last fall, she returned the affection of her canine friends by doing something to help their buddies. Deeply concerned by the budget cuts that area animal shelters were suffering due to the bad economy, and saddened by the number of homeless pets who weren't being adopted, Lenkus decided to take action.

She had heard of a photographer in another community who had raised funds for animal welfare organizations by shooting pet portraits in return for donations, and thought that she could duplicate the event to benefit shelters in her area.

Thus was born Dog Days 2011, in which participants paid \$25 per pet for a 15-minute shoot with Lenkus, one 5-by-7 print (or an 8-by-10 if the owner could show proof the dog was a rescue), plus 10 percent off any additional prints or products they ordered.

All the money raised went to animal welfare organizations near Lenkus's various studios. Lenkus didn't make a dime from the event—she donated her skills and her staff's time to the effort.

To get the word out, Lenkus blogged about the fundraiser on her website, sent e-newsletters to customers and others interested in her work, mailed cards to pet supply stores and groomers, and distributed fliers. She and her staff scheduled three full Saturdays over successive weekends in September—one Saturday at each studio—to shoot the pet portraits.

When people arrived for their pet's photo shoot, they were asked to write a check for \$25 (or more, if they liked) to a local animal shelter.

All three days were soon booked up, then KTLA—a Los Angeles TV station—got word of the event, and asked to do a 6 a.m. live report at Lenkus's Long Beach studio on the last day of the fundraiser. "When the news channel reported it, that's when we got calls, and we added two more solid days after that," Lenkus says. She estimates she spent about 35 hours shooting pet portraits of roughly 90 dogs. Some owners wanted to be pictured with their pet or pets; others wanted their dogs alone in the photos.

Among the participants were Long Beach resident Jeff Towns and his rescue dog Viki, an English bulldog. "I went in intending to spend \$50, and I spent over \$350," he says.



Photographer Linnea Lenkus prides herself on being able to "capture a dog's soul" in photographs—a talent that formed the basis of a successful fundraiser for three California animal welfare organizations last fall.

Towns donated \$50 for a portrait of Viki alone, then spent \$300 for prints of a photo of the two of them to use on his Christmas cards.

"You can just see when you go into her studio, she's got a talent for photographing people and animals. [Dogs] have short attention spans, but she got Viki to pick her ears up and look," he says. The event raised nearly \$3,000, with the checks going to

Los Angeles Animal Services—North Central Shelter; Friends of Long Beach Animals, an auxiliary of the city's Companion Animal Village; and the

City of Irvine, for the Irvine Animal Care Center.

Shirley Vaughan, president of Friends of Long Beach Animals, said her nonprofit group received \$1,225 from the fundraiser. The money will support the group's local spay/neuter program and its effort to buy more Kuranda beds.

"I have not ever met her," Vaughan says of Lenkus, "but I've certainly heard enough about her to know where her heart is."

Spending all of those hours shooting pet portraits was physically challenging—"I was down on my knees a lot," Lenkus says, laughing—but the event was rewarding, and not just in terms of dollars.

"They're more than pets; they're part of your family. If I can capture a dog's soul, it's like the best thing." **AS**

To watch a video of Linnea Lenkus shooting pet portraits for the Dog Days 2011 fundraiser, visit linnealenkus.com/blog/.

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BY ARNA COHEN



Ar-cat-tectural Appeal

Some lucky New York City feral cats got fancy roofs over their heads this past winter thanks to Architects for Animals, a fundraising initiative dedicated to improving the lives of the tens of thousands of homeless cats living on city streets. Teams from some of New York's top design firms competed in the second annual Giving Shelter competition, which challenged the teams to design and build creative winter cat shelters. The results were displayed for the public at a Dec. 6 event; some could be mistaken for modern sculpture, others could be taken for something you'd leave at the curb after a weekend of hard partying, but heck, cats don't care. They just want to be warm. The winning entry was a bright yellow, trash-can inspired creation that would have made Oscar the Grouch stop grouching. The shelters were given to area feral colony caregivers, while monetary proceeds from the event were donated to the New York City Feral Cat Initiative, a program of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals.

Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match

When Stephanie Downs sees a problem, she doesn't fiddle around—she fixes it. Downs started volunteering at animal shelters a decade ago and instantly saw an urgent problem. "[People came] in with boxes of puppies and kittens," she recalls. "When they asked about spay and neuter, we would say, 'Here's a list, call this place, go get a voucher. ...' I thought, why do we have to make things so complicated?" A successful entrepreneur, Downs felt that applying business thinking to the issue would



help identify what barriers to spay/neuter needed to be overcome and how to target the right people. In 2009 she founded the Fixit Foundation, an organization based in Norfolk, Va., dedicated to ending pet overpopulation by designing systems to support incentive-based spay/neuter programs and find ways to make them available to everyone. In March 2011, Downs launched *GetYourFix.org*, a free website that connects pet owners needing spay/neuter surgery with individuals willing to fund it. The site is

The Ick Factor

David Letterman better watch his back. The International Institute for Species Exploration, part of Arizona State University, has a Top 10 List that rivals anything Letterman could come up with. Each year the institute compiles a list of the top 10 new species discovered the previous year. The 2011 list included a glow-in-the-dark mushroom, a bacterium that's eating the Titanic, a spider who can weave webs almost 10 feet across, a tree-dwelling monitor lizard, a leech with enormous teeth, and a grasshopper-legged cockroach that can leap 50 times the length of its body. Just what the world needs—another cockroach. Sigh. Next they'll be finding a new species of politician. Go to species.asu.edu/Top10.



a cross between Match.com, Craigslist, and a giving tree: After choosing one or more pets to help from the online data base, a donor contacts the client and makes the surgery and payment arrangements with a low-cost facility in the client's area. The Get Your Fix team will handle the arrangements if the donor wants to remain anonymous. Currently about 500 donors and 4,000 clients from all over the country, including Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, are registered on the site. "The funders really enjoy it, and the owners are so appreciative," says Downs.



Toe-tally Awesome

Picking up a cat from a crowded shelter last October, Amy Rowell felt a tapping on her head. "I looked up and noticed this gigantic paw," she says. "I was instantly smitten." The paw belonged to Daniel, a year-old, orange-and-white shorthair with 26 toes. Rowell decided that he, too, would come with her to the Milwaukee Animal Rescue Center, the shelter she founded in 2006 in Greendale, Wis., to help the local animal care and control agency find adoptive families. Last fall Rowell found out that the center was about to become homeless itself: Management was not renewing the lease for 2012, and Rowell had to vacate by the end of the year. She quickly found an ideal property to buy, but had no money for the down payment. Polydactyl Daniel inspired Rowell

to ask people to sponsor his toes for a dollar each by making \$26 donations. The local Fox News station broadcast from the shelter one morning, and when the video about Daniel hit the Internet ... well, we're talking viral. Toe-nations from 45 states and four countries rolled in; within two weeks, Rowell had the \$40,000 needed for the down payment, as well as funds for renovation. "It's been really exciting to think that a cat could inspire so much giving," says Rowell. "Twenty-six dollars is reasonably achievable for most people. ... They're just ... excited to be part of something that's so positive and so fun." And sweet, gentle Daniel has earned himself a permanent job as well as a home—as the new center's official mascot.

Treasured Assets

Judy Baar Topinka loves saving money and saving lives. The current Illinois state comptroller, who ran unsuccessfully for Illinois governor against Rod Blagojevich, is helping shelters and rescue groups in the state increase their adoption rates and reduce euthanasia by giving them space on her departmental website (ioc.state.il.us/index.cfm/about-our-office/comptrollers-critters1/) to feature adoptable pets. "I'm always out there for the underdog, and in this case it is the underdog," says Topinka. As of December, more than 313 animals from 100 shelters and rescues had been adopted through the Comptroller's Critters program since it went live in June 2011. Topinka notes that the adoption program not only saves animal lives, it also saves taxpayers the cost of caring for or euthanizing pets adopted from municipal shelters. The comptroller, who currently has three rescued dogs, ran a similar program when she served as state treasurer, helping to find homes for nearly 500 cats and dogs during her term. All pets adopted through Comptroller's Critters receive a certificate from Topinka, granting them, she jokes, the right to "vote for me and only me!"

